

"What is to be done with her?" said Sir Luke, holding up his hands, and casting a rueful look at his companion.

"Nothing rash—nothing violent; she possesses a strong mind and good talents. By and by she will think and judge for herself. Sow but the good seed in her heart, and God will give the increase. I have more hope for her in her perverseness, than if she were totally indifferent upon the subject. Opposition is sooner overcome than apathy; wait patiently, and see what a few weeks will bring forth."

The priest retired to his chamber, and Sir Luke betook himself to the sports of the field, and Monica and her cousin had a long argument, which nearly ended in a quarrel, about the merits and demerits of the new chaplain.

### CHAPTER III.

DARK, wet and gloomy the morning dawned; but neither threats nor entreaties could prevail upon the wilful Monica to accompany the family to church. Sir Luke stormed, Mr. Vincent re-proved, and Barbara scolded, but Monica had her own way.

After watching the party disappear through the old Gothic door-way of the church, she returned to her own room, and drawing a small crucifix from a drawer, placed it on her table, and sinking upon her knees before it, relieved her swelling heart with a bitter gush of tears.

"Oh! crucified Redeemer!" she cried, "blessed hope of my fathers! may I never be induced to forsake thee: still shed upon thy erring child the marvellous light of thy glorious presence!"

After spending several hours in going through a long form of prayers, she rose from her knees, and put back the bright brown curls that shaded her face, and which were moistened by her tears. Her eyes suddenly rested upon a plainly-bound book, which lay upon the table, and which had evidently been placed there on purpose to attract her attention. She quickly took it up, then flung it from her, as if she had been stung by a viper. It was a copy of the new translation of the Bible, which had been ordered to be read in all the churches throughout the realm.

"From Mr. Vincent, of course; but he need not imagine that I will read it."

Still, as her eye rested upon the volume, a strong curiosity to look into it, entered her heart. Its having been prohibited by the priests of her own persuasion, added to the strength of the temptation. She would only look at the cover and examine the clasps; there could be no harm in that.

Oh, woman! woman! hadst thou left the tree the moment Satan tempted thee to eat of the forbidden fruit, thou hadst been safe, and thy children free. Curiosity is a strong fiend; it mastered Monica in the end, and she hastily unclosed the book. On the fly leaf, she discovered the following sentence, written in a very beautiful clear hand:

"Monica Conway, from a friend who earnestly prays for her salvation."

"I shew!" muttered Monica; but she read on—

"Oh! hope not, hapless maid, to find  
Alone, the strait and narrow way;  
When born in sin, by nature blind,  
In error's paths you darkly stray,  
Read! may the star of faith illumine,  
The clouds that shade life's dreary road;  
And rising o'er the sullen tomb,  
Reveal the gate that leads to God!"

Monica turned over the leaves doubtfully; in spite of herself, those lines softened her heart towards Master Vincent. He seemed to take an interest in her destiny, and she believed him sincere.

"The book shall speak for itself," she said; "come what may, I will read it."

Carefully bolting the door, and glancing wistfully round the apartment, to see that no human eye was upon her, she turned to the first chapter of St. Matthew and began to read.

What a wondrous book is the Bible, particularly read for the first time, by a person arrived at an age to think and act, and reason for himself. It is lifting up the curtain that hides the invisible world, and catching a reflection of the glory of God from behind it.

Monica read on, and almost gasped for breath, such was the intense and overpowering interest its mysterious pages awoke in her breast. All power of throwing it aside was taken from her; she could no longer put it down. Her first impression was, that she was a lost creature—that nothing could save her; then again, wrapt into admiration at the glorious character of the Redeemer, sudden gleams of divine light shot across the dark chaos of her mind, giving birth to hopes which raised her high above the howling billows of despair. At length she closed the book, but not until the last chapter of the Apocalypse had been concluded; and sat for a long time in deep thought, her head resting upon her clasped hands.

The shades of evening were closing round her. The family had returned from the last public service of the day; and Barbara Hentherton, alarmed at her cousin's long absence, knocked hastily at the door.

"Monica, are you well? Open quickly!"